

# Promising Practices for Strengthening Primary Care

## Family Care Team Access for Network Partners



### The challenge

In Conception Bay North, Newfoundland and Labrador, many people lack access to team-based primary care or a family doctor. This shortage leads to people going without care or an increased reliance on emergency departments (EDs) as the primary access point for healthcare. There was no established integrated pathway in Conception Bay North for community physicians to refer directly to family care team members.

### The promising practice

Encourage doctors in private clinics to refer patients for services within family care teams, following this process:

- Doctor determines that patient could benefit from care with an allied health professional and contacts referral navigator.
- Referral navigator collaborates with the doctor to confirm appropriateness of the referral and updates the patient's electronic medical record (EMR).
- Referral navigator schedules the appointment for the patient for service from an allied health professional within a family care team.
- A summary report is sent to patient's doctor following appointment with family health team.

### Example impacts

Between July and September 2024, example impacts included:

- Private family practice clinics referred 44 patients to allied health professional services within a family care team (e.g., physiotherapy assessment, social navigation and assessment). All of these patients indicated they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the care they received from the allied health service providers.
- Physicians at participating private clinics reported they worked more at their highest scope of practice by utilizing providers within the family care team to support tasks they would typically complete themselves.
- A pathway was created using EMR to coordinate referrals between private clinics and family care teams. Providers are now able to confidentially share information between private clinics and family care teams within the EMR. Paper referral forms have also been developed to support private clinics who are not using EMR.

### Potential future impacts

- Increased time that private physicians can work at top of scope via the process of internal team referrals in the family care team.
- Increase access to primary care allied health services as a prevention and treatment tool to decrease future waitlists by maximizing existing resources.

**"(Physiotherapist) was great and very helpful. She printed off exercises and showed me how to do them. Didn't know what to expect. It was great."**  
- NLHS patient



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## Keys to success

- **Funding** for a referral navigator and to create the patient referral navigation pathway.
- **Champions:** Community physician champions who see the value in the work done by allied health members of family care teams will help increase understanding of the team and put the focus on prevention and disease management.
- **Meaningful partnerships with community physicians and family care teams** to monitor and share what's working well, what could be better, and ways to improve over time to better enable safe and high-quality healthcare.



## Lessons learned

- Trust and positive relationships with community physicians and effective engagement is paramount for success.
- Consider social determinants of health when referring patients to services within family care teams.
- Be flexible and respond to challenges and roadblocks.
- Patients in our community were often not aware of family care team and navigation services available.

## How can I learn more?

Contact the organization.

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## Why was this summary created?

**Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services (NLHS),** participated in **Healthcare Excellence Canada's (HEC) Strengthening Primary Care (SPC) program.**

SPC brought together 20 primary care organizations from across Canada to advance practices to improve access to safe, including culturally safe, team-based primary care. This promising practice summary was co-produced with NLHS to help others learn about their work and generate discussion about how similar approaches could be adapted and applied elsewhere.

